

The Kongo Cross Across Centuries

Geoffroy Heimlich

Unlike rock art in the Sahara and southern Africa, both extensively documented, rock art in central Africa is still widely unknown. Even though already reported in the sixteenth century by the missionary Diego Santissimo Sacramento (1583) and in the nineteenth century by James Tuckey (Tuckey and Smith 1818) during his exploration of the Congo River, it has never been the focus of a comprehensive research project. As a result, its age still remains uncertain. Preliminary research revealed one coherent entity: the Lovo Massif, which is the topic of my doctoral dissertation (Heimlich 2010, 2014).

Presently inhabited by the Ndibu, one of the Kongo sub-groups, the Lovo Massif is situated north of the ancient Kongo kingdom (Fig. 1). Kongo has been, since the end of the fifteenth century, one of the best-documented kingdoms of Africa for recent periods in terms of historical records and ethnographic and anthropological studies, but in archaeological terms it remains largely unknown. With 102 sites (including 16 decorated caves), the Lovo Massif is the largest concentration of rock art in the entire region, containing more than 5,000 rock images.

ROCK ART: SOURCE FOR THE HISTORY OF THE KONGO KINGDOM

One of my priorities was to determine the relationships between rock art and the Kongo cultural area. I was able to obtain direct dates for charcoal drawings by the Carbon-14 dating process, which never had been done in this region. Dated from cal AD 1270 to 1800, these first elements of dating confirm their relationships with the Kongo kingdom and with its rituals (Fig. 2). This set of results has allowed me to integrate rock art with Kongo ritual practices, confirming that certain rituals and aspects of Kongo symbolism are pre-Christian. They also show

that the rock art is a complementary illustration of the variety of decorative motifs found in a number of objects such as baskets and textiles, ivory horns and pottery, crucifixes and tombstones, headgear and ornaments, as well as signatures of Kongo kings and nobles. To illustrate this, let us examine one such motif, the sign of the cross, focusing on its function and meaning (Fig. 3).

“KONGO CROSS” AND KIMPASI

As attested by the atypical crosses of the Nkamba cave, which may well go back to the thirteenth century, the cross is a key symbol of the Kongo cosmology, independent of European influence. Other, more recent crosses, like those of the Tovo cave, date from the seventeenth century, and are similar in their form to many objects of Kongo Christian art (Fig. 4).

At the center of missionaries' concerns, the cross was one of the main insignia of the *kimpasi* initiation ceremony. Reported in the second half of the seventeenth century, the *kimpasi* took place south of the Congo River. This initiation happens whenever the community feels the need to grow stronger to remedy diseases that plague it (see, for instance, Cavazzi da Montecuccolo 1687:69–70, de Bouveignes and Cuvelier 1951:156–65, da Caltanisetta and Bontinck 1970:154, Salvatore 2003:161). A pinnacle of resistance to Christianity, it was seen by early missionaries as a major obstacle to their evangelization (Thornton 1983:61, 2002:82). In the Capuchin sources, Girolamo da Montesarchio, Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi da Montecuccolo, and Marcellino d'Atri are among the few missionaries who testified in much detail about the importance of symbols used during the *kimpasi*. They were astonished to discover the role played by the sign of the cross. Girolamo da Montesarchio specifies that, at the entrance of the *kimpasi*, a large portico was decorated with the “sacred sign of the cross painted with different colors.” A pit sur-



1 Typical karst landscape of the Lovo Massif, 2010.

Photo: Geoffroy Heimlich

Hundreds of limestone outcrops with carved surfaces, as well as numerous caves and rocky overhangs, rise up over an area of about 430 square kilometers.

2 Tracing of the decorated cave of Nkamba. Nkamba cave, 2010.

Photo: Geoffroy Heimlich

A human figure, with the left hand on the hip and the right arm raised, has been dated by Carbon-14 between cal AD 1270 and 1620. This date confirms the symbolic importance of this posture in Kongo visual culture, which may well go back to the thirteenth century.

rounded by thorns also protected the enclosure (de Bouveignes and Cuvelier 1951:157). The cross was also used to strengthen the power of an idol (Cavazzi da Montecuccolo 1687:69, de Bouveignes and Cuvelier 1951:256).

As Marcellino d'Atri pointed out, the cross of this *kimpasi* of the Kibangu region was placed at the center of the altar and flanked by two *kiteke*,¹ statues of human form (Toso 1984:201–202).² Objects of Kongo (lion teeth, animal tails) and Christian (sprinklers and incense) worship were also used in the ceremony. The cross was therefore linked to the idea of a cycle of life and death, a basis of the key ritual of the group.³

THE NKISI OF THE NKAMBA CAVE

In the decorated cave of Nkamba, I excavated an archaeological deposit, hidden in a crevice of the wall, consisting of a gourd, chalk, three pebbles with cupules covered with the same material, a perforated husk of the *nsansi* tree (*Oncoba spinosa*),⁴ partially burned stems of *lusangu-sangu* (*Cymbopogon densiflorus*),⁵ and two knotted lianas, dated from cal AD 1640 and 1945, one of which is colored red with ocher (Fig. 6).⁶

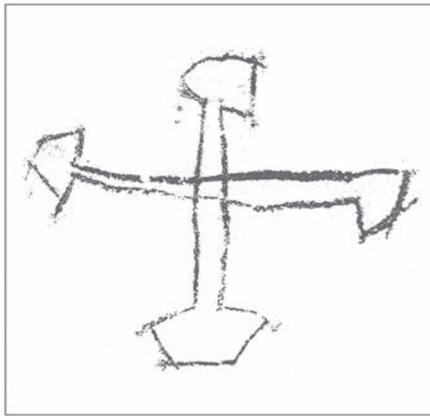
Of traditional Kongo rituals, the use of *nkisi* was particularly fought by the missionaries.⁷ In his description of the Loango religion of the mid-seventeenth century, Olfert Dapper gives the following definition:

These Ethiopians call Moquisie or Mokissis anything that in their opinion contains a secret and incomprehensible power to work good or evil on them, and to reveal past and future things (Dapper 1686:335, my translation).

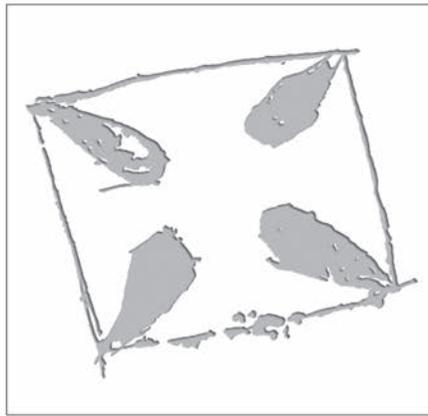
Stones with strange shapes and twisted wood were generally associated with *nkita*,⁸ supernatural forces playing a main role in the *kimpasi* ceremony. In 1699, Luca da Caltanissetta also notes that “warped or rotten sticks and other filth that blind people venerate” were among the *kimpasi* objects of worship (da Caltanissetta and Bontinck 1970:157, my translation).

For comparison, a modern description of this type of *nkisi* was made by Joseph van Wing (1959:438–40).⁹ This is the Nsanga Nkita, the *nkisi* of the *kimpasi* among the Mpangu-Ntandu. In addition to wild banana seeds, the sacred gourd also contained a stone, white clay and red clay extracted at the same location of the river, *lusangu-sangu* leaves, and the twisted root of an aquatic tree called Na Kisimbi or Lord Water Spirit. The stone contained in the Nsanga Nkita was named *tadi di Kalunga* or stone of Kalunga. Kalunga commonly refers to the ocean (see, for instance, Thompson 1984:109; Thompson et al. 1981:28, 44; De Heusch 2000:161). The aquatic tree called Na Kisimbi would belong to the class of *simbi* local spirits. The prefix Na- is an honorific title. According to Joseph van Wing (1959:438), the seeds of this banana tree would constitute the “principal component of the fetish.”¹⁰

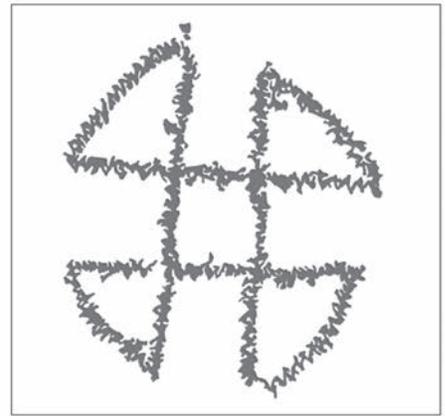




SI-CR-A1 and A2



SI-CR-A4



SI-CR-B

“THE SIGNS, IT’S DURING THE KIMPASI AND THE NKITA”

“He knows. He’s seen. It was forbidden. Not just anyone can go to *kimpasi*. It’s not no matter who. They can return to the village. But you villagers, you can’t go where there are people of *kimpasi*. There were people who went there to be initiated. All over. In almost all the villages. The Tadi dia Kimpasi, it’s there where the ceremony took place. Yes, they wrote. He’s seen, but he didn’t understand since he was young.”¹¹

Even today, several testimonies relate some of these sites in the Lovo massif to the *kimpasi* ceremonies. Two of my informants, Pierre-Constant Makumbu and Ndongala Menakuntima, respectively traditional chiefs of Kuluzu dia Lovo and Nkula 2, have told me that two outcrops were still known for having sheltered some *kimpasi* until the early twentieth century. Tadi dia Kimpasi and Mongo dia Ngiadilwa are both located near the Tovo cave. Below Mongo dia Ngiadilwa is situated the old village of Mbanza Mbota and its cemetery. I have identified three previously unknown rock art sites there. These rock images are similar to those of the Tovo cave, especially the “Kongo cross” (Fig. 7). Moreover, Pierre-Constant Makumbu, initiated to the *kimpasi*, has revealed to me that during the initiation, paintings of red and black colors were made.

All the foregoing show well, as Andele Fu Kiau (Fu-Kiau kia Bunseki-Lumanisa 1969:122), Robert Farris Thompson (Thompson et al. 1981, Thompson 2002:32–33), and Wyatt MacGaffey (MacGaffey 1986:44–45, Janzen and MacGaffey 1974:34) have pointed out, that the use of the cross predates the arrival of missionaries and is derived from an old Kongo symbolic heritage. For Robert Farris Thompson (1984:109), “God is imagined at the top, the dead at the bottom, and water in between. The four disks at the points of the cross stand for the four moments of the sun, and the circumference of the cross the certainty of reincarnation.” Continuity between this rock art and some Kongo designs and cosmograms have also been suggested, including the cross.¹² From his analysis of rock art, Barbaro Martinez-Ruiz (2007:187, 2013:54–59) affirms that the “Kongo cosmogram,” transmitted through the millennia, would fit without ruptures into the present Kongo beliefs.¹³



3 The types of crosses

Photo: Geoffroy Heimlich

Crosses A1-2, A4 and B are the three cruciform types found the most frequently at Lovo.

4 Kongo crosses in the decorated cave of Tovo. Tovo cave, 2011.

Photo: Geoffroy Heimlich

Dated directly from cal AD 1630 to 1800, two A1-type crosses whose lines intersect in the middle are similar to many objects of Kongo Christian art from the same period.

In her remarkable study, Cecile Fromont (2014) broadens the perspective. Like ivory tusks, pottery, and weaving, rock art would make frequent reference in its motifs to textile patterns and would use in its compositions the diamond shape as the basic unit. The cruciform motifs would also respond to the same organizing principle, two segments intersecting at right angles in their middle, forming the diagonals of a rhombus, what she identifies as the “Kongo cross” (Fromont 2011:109–23). She notes, “as a space of correlation, the cross expressed a new worldview in which local and foreign, old and new ideas met and blurred” (Fromont 2014:79; see also Thornton n.d.). At the confluence of Kongo and Christian religious thought, the cross was therefore a



(clockwise from top left)
5 Cross traced on the rock art site of Songantela. Songantela rock art site, 2011.
 Photo: Geoffroy Heimlich

6 The *nkisi* of the decorated cave of Nkamba Nkamba cave, 2010

Lianas, pebbles, gourd, chalk, other material
 Institute of the National Museums of Congo, Kinshasa

Photo: Geoffroy Heimlich

A *nkisi* is a magical object with intercessory powers. The objects called *nkisi* are carved wooden statuettes, or, for example, pottery pieces, baskets, animal horns or shells.

7 Cross inventoried in the Mbanza Mbota outcrop. Mbanza Mbota rock art site, 2008.

Photo: Geoffroy Heimlich

Located below Mongo dia Ngiadilwa, on the summit of which *kimpasi* were organized, I found in the Mbanza Mbota outcrop some rock art sites decorated with Kongo crosses like those in the Tovo cave.



symbol of equal importance in both worlds, belonging to the Kongo traditional religion as well as Christianity (Fig. 5). As such, it seems very likely that at least some of the Lovo Massif rock was linked to the *kimpasi* initiation ceremony (see, for instance, Heimlich 2013a:34–37, 2013b:38–39; Heimlich et al. 2013:1383–90).

DECORATED CAVES AND GRAVES

Present mainly in the Ndimbankondo outcrop and in the caves of Ntoto and Ntadi Ntadi, cross A4 is similar in its style and its iconography to Kongo Christian objects, particularly crucifixes and tombstones. A tombstone and a crucifix coming from the excavations of the Ngongo Mbata church are decorated with this same pattern.¹⁴ The crucifix is decorated on two branches of two crosses A4 drawn in white (Fig. 8). The cross of the tombstone has been painted in red (Fig. 9). The period of occupation of the site is estimated to be the second half of the seventeenth century and the early eighteenth century.¹⁵ As reported by missionaries on many occasions, one of the privileges of being a Christian was to be buried inside a church.¹⁶ In total, at least thirty-five graves were discovered at Ngongo Mbata (Vandenhouste 1972–73 1:27–69, Clist et al. 2015a:485). In this funeral context, Kongo crucifixes were frequently used.

The relationship with the ancestors is a key point.¹⁷ In the Kongo traditional religion, the dead remain around their graves, helping the living or punishing them. In contrast, the dead have no influence on the living in Christian theology. Many Capuchins underscored this point. In 1653, Serafino da Cortona indicated in its list of unacceptable practices a ritual that consisted of bowing down in front of the grave of an ancestor to obtain, for instance, success in war (Piazza 1976:324). His contemporary, Antonio Giovanni Cavazzi da Montecuccolo, adds that “these souls wander about or remain in one place, needing like travelers to eat and drink and to dress and [...] that the soul can hurt relatives and enemies.”¹⁸

Both Christian and Kongo in their iconography and their message, Kongo crosses of crucifixes and tombstones thus reflect the encounter between Christian and Kongo religious thought, suggesting the possibility of a passage between life and death.¹⁹ On some Kongo crucifixes, the same type as cross A4, this time inscribed within a circle rather than a square, symbolizes the halo of Christ on the cross.²⁰ As Cécile Fromont stresses, the halo is placed in most cases not on Christ’s head but at the intersection of



(clockwise from top left)

8a Kongo crucifix
Ngongo Mbata church, 2013
Iron; 115 cm x 48 cm
University Museum of Prehistory, University of Kinshasa
Photo: Geoffroy Heimlich

8b Detail of Figure 8a
Photo: Geoffroy Heimlich

9 Tombstone
Ngongo Mbata church, 2013
Stone; 28 cm x 25 cm
University Museum of Prehistory, University of Kinshasa
Photo: Geoffroy Heimlich
This crucifix and this tombstone come from the excavations of the Ngongo Mbata church, located in the former province of Mbata. They are both decorated with the same type of cross, A4.



two branches of the crucifix, “thus placing the Latin cross in the area of Kongo cosmology” (Fromont 2014:87).²¹ Another important detail: this Kongo cross symbolizing Christ’s halo is named in Kikongo *ki-mpu-mpu ka oro* by Joris van Gheel (van Wing and Penders 1928:72), which could be translated as “gold head-dress.” Therefore, this pattern was attached to power.²²

This could be confirmed by rock art sites. Like churches, several caves have also served as cemeteries. The A4 cross type was especially observed in two decorated caves: Ntadi Ntadi and Ntoto, both now belonging to the Kanka village. These crosses, drawn in black, are in both cases at the entrances of the caves. In the Ntoto cave, a grave “was found under a rock [...] close to a huge round hole.”²³ In this respect, I hypothesize that some of the rock art could have taken on a ritual function in a funerary context.

“KONGO CROSS” AND SANTU

The A4 cross type is also present in other contexts more specifically related to Kongo traditional religion. While the A4 crosses of Ntoto and Ntadi Ntadi are simply drawn in black, those of the Ndimbankondo outcrop have a more elaborate style and technique (Fig. 10). On site 1 of Ndimbankondo, nineteen crosses of this type have been inventoried. All are inscribed within a square. Three of these are related in their form to cross B. In general, their outline is engraved by a linear trace. The space

between each branch, of oval form, is marked by a polished surface. The crosses are more rarely painted in red or black. In most cases, they are associated with each other or with geometric patterns evoking cross B. They can also be coupled with anthropomorphs holding a firearm, sometimes accompanied by a canine, and can be facing a zoomorphic figure. The posture of these anthropomorphs, with the left hand on the hip and the right arm raised, is characteristic of Kongo art.

Analyses by X-ray diffraction and infrared spectroscopy have enabled me to recognize the same recipe on twelve samples of red pigment. It is a mineral pigment of red ocher, composed mainly of hematite and kaolinite type clay. I have not found a trace of organic mediums likely to have retained a sufficient amount of carbon for radiocarbon dating. Nevertheless, closer observation of firearms could provide a chronological indication. On one representation in particular, we can discern the belt, the deck plate to protect the trigger, the barrel, the butt, and an amulet (Fig. 11). It could be a musket present in the seventeenth and eighteenth century in the Kongo kingdom, as attested by many chroniclers.²⁴ In the early eighteenth century, at the time of activity of the Ngongo Mbata church, Father Lorenzo da Lucca mentions several times the use of the cross to strengthen hunting “fetishes,” mainly in the Mbamba province (da Lucca et Cuvelier 1953:331-332, 244).



10 Tracing of a *santu* cross at the rock art site of Ndimbankondo. Ndimbankondo rock art site, 2010. Photo: Geoffroy Heimlich

11 Anthropomorph holding a firearm at Ndimbankondo. Ndimbankondo rock art site, 2010. Photo: Geoffroy Heimlich
More than once we observe scenes showing anthropomorphs armed with a rifle, accompanied with dogs and facing animals (antelopes mostly), in groups that could be interpreted as hunting scenes.

In the late nineteenth century, some practices comparable to previous ones were observed in the Lower Congo and described by English (Bentley 1900, Weeks 1908–1909, Johnston 1908) and Swedish (Olson-Manke 1928) Protestant missionaries. The main object of worship was the “*santu* cross” that Edvard Laman (1936:878) defines in his dictionary as a “hunting *nkisi*” and a “wooden cross used magically” (Fig. 12). For Rob Wannyn (1961:36), it would be the Santa Cruz, also known as *santus* or *kluzi*. In general, these signs are made up of four type A4 crosses, arranged in the form of a cross and generally mounted on a sharp steel-tipped rod. The entire work is burnished by the blood of animal sacrifices and smoke. In total, I identified eleven examples of this type.²⁵ There are still other objects related to the same worship, especially anthropomorphic sculptures, necklaces, and pipes (Wannyn 1961:79 and pl. 23, Olson-Manke 1928:217–23). The *santu* crosses were discovered throughout the Lower Congo south of the river and in the Mbanza Kongo region, that is to say, in a large part of each of the former provinces of Mpemba, Nsundi, Mpangu, and Mbata. For authors who have studied it, this type of cross would date from the first evangelization of the Kongo kingdom (see Bentley 1900 1:36, Johnston 1908 1:188, Olson-Manke 1928:222–23, Manker 1929:112–13, Wannyn 1961:79, Balandier 1965:245, Volper 2011:109–16, Fromont 2014:262–65). However, no known items are precisely dated.

Let us now observe the ritual described by John Weeks (1908:409–37, 1909:181–201, 1914:188). In a prelude to the hunt,

the first rite consists in asking the protection of a great hunter. With his back to the grave and in front of the hunters, the *kim-povela*—the *santu* initiate—kneels down. Hunters approach him slowly clapping their hands, then sit in their turn around the grave (Weeks 1908:432). One of the hunters tenders to the initiate a gourd of palm wine. In response, the latter makes to the first hunter a sign of the cross and offers this wine ritually to the deceased hunter, begging him to intercede in favor of the hunters. The celebrant of the cult then rubs the forehead, temples, forearms, wrists, knees, and feet of the participants and their rifles with some earth on which the wine was poured (Weeks 1908:433). When the hunt is successful, the bladder of the animal





12 Santu cross used in rituals
Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, Belgium,
EO.0.0.784
Photo: J. Van de Vyver, © MRAC Tervuren, 2016

13 Letter written by D. Manuel, brother of Afonso I
in 1543.
Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, PT/TT/
CC/1/73/41
Photo: Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo
In this letter dated from August 9, 1543, D. Manuel
asks the Portuguese king João III to give him back
400 cruzados that a certain Diogo de Campos owed
to his brother, Afonso I.

killed is filled with blood, then brought in the *kimpovela*. Only the blood of antelope is offered this way. During a successful hunt, the *kimpovela* sticks the *santu* cross in the ground near the grave of a great hunter. The blood of the bladder is then poured on the cross as an offering to the ancestor hunter. The *kimpovela* places the fatal bullet in the “heart,” that is to say, the small hole in the center of the cross, then he sprays it with blood (Weeks 1908:433, 1909b:181–82).²⁶

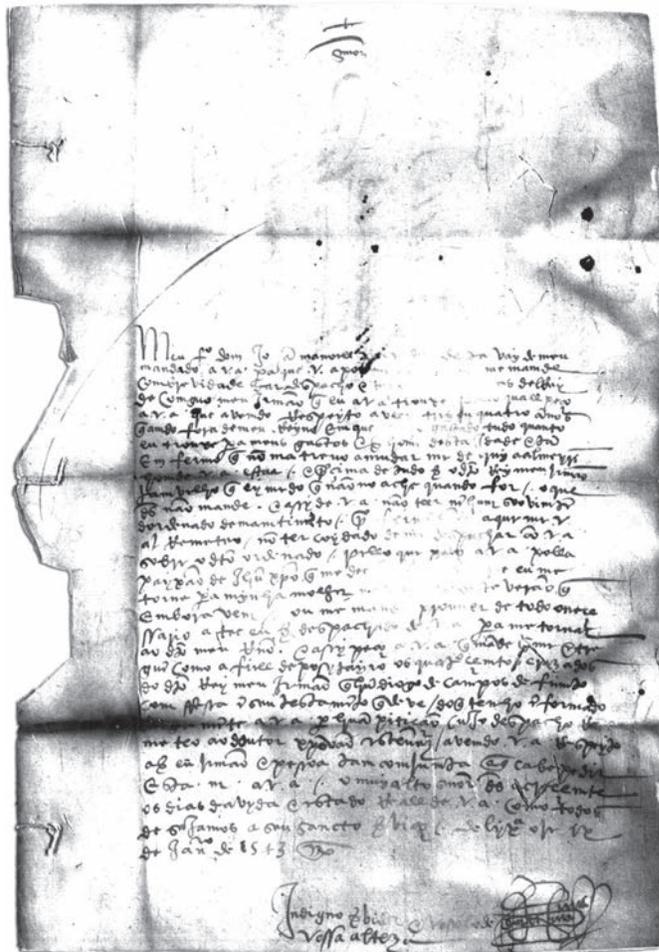
Again, we can note in this ritual a close link maintained with the ancestors. The *santu* cross hammered into the grave of a great hunter allowed one to obtain the blessing.²⁷ In reference to this ritual, I hypothesize that the rock art of Ndimbankondo could be linked in part to the *santu* institution. As such, the scenes associating anthropomorphs brandishing firearms, accompanied by canines, and facing a zoomorph, could be interpreted as hunting scenes. As I have observed, the types of cruciform motifs of Ndimbankondo and those of the *santu* cross are identical. Unlike previous authors describing them as Maltese crosses, I will define this pattern as the *santu* cross.

CROSS B AND SIGNATURES

Cross B is one of the most common cruciform types in the Lovo Massif. However, this pattern could be identified on only one Kongo art object. This is an arm shackle coming from Mbanza Kongo and kept today in the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren.²⁸ Symbols of power, arm rings formed part of the regalia of the Kongo elite (Thornton 1992: 57–63, Blakely 2006:184–85). The engraved cross could increase the prestige and value of the bracelet, strengthening its symbolic force. Rob Wanny attributes this arm shackle to the sixteenth and seventeenth century, without details.

However, throughout the sixteenth century this same cross B is found frequently on signatures of Portuguese kings and nobles, for example on letters written in 1514 and 1516 by Manuel I d’Aviz, king of Portugal and contemporary to the Kongo King Afonso I Mvemba a Nzinga,²⁹ as well as on a copy of an investigation ordered by the Portuguese King João III in 1548. Similarly, this cross pattern is observed identically on signatures of Kongo nobles under Portuguese influence, for instance on a letter from D. Manuel, brother of King Afonso I (Fig. 13).³⁰ Here, again, we see that this pattern of prestige and power is attached to the nobility and royalty.

This type of cross is also similar to that of metal pendants worn by the Tshokwe women that Marie-Louise Bastin identifies as the *cingelengelye* (Bastin 1961:147–53). Used in the early nineteenth century, this pattern would be for the Tshokwe the symbol of



Nzambi, which means “God” (Bastin 1961:149). This type of cross would derive, she says, from the cross of the Order of the Christ and would date from the late fifteenth century, “where certain Christian objects of piety, or some symbols reproducing them, have slowly spread inward” (Bastin 1961:1950, my translation).

AT THE CROSSROADS OF KONGO AND CHRISTIAN SYMBOLISM

To summarize, the cross was a key symbol not only of Christianity but also of Kongo cosmology, as indicated by its use in rock art and various forms of local artistic expression (Fromont 2014:75).

Both Christian and Kongo in their iconography, crosses A1–A2 and A4 are found together in the Ntadi Ntadi cave and on one of the crucifixes discovered during the excavations of Ngongo Mbata. On the site of Ndimbankondo, crosses A4 and B are joined formally into a single pattern. These observations suggest that these cruciform types could have been used during the same period, without any indication of their antiquity. For this, new direct radiocarbon datings should be carried out on these patterns.

This study allowed me to put forward the composite content of the message of the cross, which is an articulation of an ancient religious syncretism (Fromont 2011:109–23, Thornton 2013:53–77). At the forefront of the missionaries’ concerns, it was one of the main insignia of the *kimpasi* initiation ceremony. In some cases, the cross is found in the center of the altar, flanked by two *kiteke*, statues of human form. In other case, painted crosses can also indicate the places consecrated to the *kimpasi* association. Thus the cross was linked to the idea of the cyclical passage of life and death, the key ritual of *kimpasi*. Stones with strange shapes and twisted, red-colored pieces of wood, symbolizing the *nkita* supernatural powers, also appear in the decorated cave of Nkamba. Still today, in the Massif de Lovo, several testimonies

relate some of these sites to *kimpasi* ceremonies. These elements seem to link some of the rock art to the *kimpasi* initiation.

Unlike Christian theology, the ancestors remain a part of the Kongo traditional religion, alongside the living, to intercede or not in their favor. Like churches where the Kongo nobility were buried, caves could also have played a role in funeral ceremonies, as the necropolis cave of Nkila Ngandu and the one of Ntoto could attest.³¹ Moreover, one of the main rituals of the *santu* institution there also consisted of bowing down on the grave of a deceased hunter in order to obtain his blessing.

Decorating a large number of regalia (headdresses, ornaments, crucifixes, or tombstones), the cross was a symbol of prestige and value related to power and royalty. It contributed to strengthen the links with the supernatural forces whose presence it symbolized.

My study of the viewpoints of ethnology, history, archaeology, and mythology shows that rock art was an important part of Kongo culture. Simple signs, such as the cross, may start to “talk” if they can be dated and placed in a specific cultural context. My study has also allowed me to supplement the understanding of the Kongo decorative system, showing that rock art is a part of the same system of ornamentation and is an important part of the vestiges of the former Kongo kingdom. Just as historical records and oral traditions do, rock art can provide historians with first-class documentation that offers a glimpse of the past of Africa.

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Notes

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1 In his dictionary, Joris van Gheel translates *kiteke* as “simulacrum, idol” (van Wing and Penders 1928:89).

2 Although it is not directly mentioned, note the importance played by the cave in this *kimpasi*.

3 The central, defining rite consisted of an initiation ceremony where the future initiates were made to undergo death and, possessed by the *nkita* spirits, resurrection in the sacred compound (de Bouveignes and Cuvelier 1951:157).

4 Until the early twentieth century, these were made into rattles especially used in rituals. They were emptied and attached to a small stick or suspended from a rope (Wing 1938:258, Söderberg 1956:89, pl.6).

5 “A kind of aromatic rush that [burnt] has the property to ward off evil spirits” (Mankenda, cited by de Heusch 2000:161, my translation).

6 The red-colored liana has been dated directly to 225 ± 30 BP, that is to say between cal AD 1645 and 1947 (SacA 17789). The second one (C44h26-I-n10), is more ancient. Its dating is 235 ± 30 BP, that is to say, between

cal AD 1641 et 1808 cal AD (SacA 17790).

7 For a more detailed discussion of this topic, see Thornton 1998a:245, 2001:80, 2013:73–74. As Wyatt MacGaffey also notes (1986:197), the significance of *nkisi* during the seventeenth century is comparable to that of the twentieth century, although the term was used by missionaries to mean the sacred, the holy.

8 For instance, the *nkita* spirit named Lusunzi (da Caltanisetta and Bontinck 1970:210–17).

9 For Wyatt MacGaffey (MacGaffey et al. 1993:27), an *nkisi* is “a spirit personality controlling a particular activity or function (pl. *bakisi*). Also, a material composite through which such a spirit can be approached (*minkisi*).” The repositories, which are used to this term, are carved wooden statuettes, or pottery, baskets, horns, or shells, for example.

10 To test this hypothesis, a sedimentary analysis is underway to determine the presence of banana phytoliths. If this hypothesis were to be confirmed, the use of this *nkisi* in the *kimpasi* initiation ceremony could perhaps be traced back to the seventeenth and eighteenth century.

11 Interview with Pierre-Constant Makumbu, traditional chief of Kuluzu dia Lovo (my translation). Born in 1920, Mbuta Muntu Makumbu is of the Nzinga clan.

12 On this subject, see the methodological precautions raised by Vansina (1982:30), Thornton (n.d.), Tshiluila (1986:335), and de Maret (1994:187) for whom: “... one may question the validity of the interpretation given by informants who, although Kongo, came

from other areas and are separated from the artist by several centuries.” In the same way, Fromont (2014:76) points out: “Continuity in form does not necessarily entail continuity in meaning, however. A historically grounded analysis of the material is essential for establishing the significance of these designs from the sixteenth through the eighteenth century.”

13 Martínez-Ruiz (2007:187, 2013:54–59) compares the rock art sites of the Lovo Massif with the cave of Kiantapo in Katanga and the Angolan sites of Caninguiri and Quissanje dating, according him, from 7840 ± 80 years ago, Tshitundo-Hulo from 2596 ± 53 years ago, and Cambambi “around two hundred years old.” His dates for the rock art are therefore based on the excavations at the foot of the decorated walls by José Rodrigues Dos Santos and Carlos Ervedosa without checking if there is a direct relationship between the paintings and the archaeological material discovered, which also raises a question of methodology.

14 These two pieces are today kept in the University Museum of Prehistory of the Kinshasa University. The crucifix was published several times, particularly Bal (1963:130) and Jiunshyan (2005:190). For the tombstone, see the description of the collections made by Van Moorsel (1964:202–205).

15 Tourneur (1939:21–26), Bequaert (1940:15–16), Vandenhoute (1972–73), Fromont (2008:174), Clist et al. 2015a:495–96). Near the church, a small stone building has been dated to 120 ± 30 BP, that is to say between cal AD 1665 and 1949 (Beta 347644) (Clist et

al. 2013:66, Clist et al. 2015a:479, 487).

16 This tradition is reported, for example, by Giovanni Francesca da Roma during his visit to San Salvador in 1645 (da Roma and Bontinck 1964:109–110) or later, in 1700, by Antonio Zucchelli for the Dona Anna's funeral, one of the wives of Don Antonio, Prince of Soyo (Zucchelli 1715:369–71). See also Heywood and Thornton (2013:19).

17 Regarding the cult of deaths, see the discussion of John Thornton (2001:80, 85; 2002:41–42). In particular, he notes, "In Kongo the dead remained imminent in the areas around their tombs, helping or punishing their descendants as the situation warranted, while in Christian theology, of course, the dead went off to other places, remote from this earth and had no influence upon the living. This was something that even the Jesuits of 1548 noted, as well as Capuchins visiting later, and it was probably a fixed element of local belief that never yielded very well to specific Christian teaching" (Thornton 2002:41–42).

18 Cavazzi da Montecuculo and Thornton (n.d.:chap. 8). In *Missione Evangelica*, other passages deal with these rituals (n.d.:chap. 12 and 22 sic). See also one of the watercolors of Bernardo d'Asti in his *Missione in Pratica* (Guattini and Carli 2006:237).

19 Other crucifixes with the same pattern were identified: one is kept in the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren (n° HO.1963.66.1) and two others are part of a private collection (Falgayrettes-Leveau 2002:154, Volper 2011:pl. 3).

20 Two crucifixes of this type were identified: one is kept in the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren (n° 55.95.8) and the other in the Musée Dapper in Paris (Falgayrettes-Leveau 2002:156).

21 Many Kongo rituals were held at crossroads. See for instance da Lucca et Cuvelier (1953:138, 141, 144).

22 The *mpu*, or "headdress, hat, cap, crown, diadem" (van Wing and Penders 1928:202), was part of the regalia of Kongo royalty and nobility. *Ka oro* means "gold" (van Wing and Penders 1928:285). See Gibson and McGurk (1977:71–96), Bassani and McLeod (2000:279–80).

23 See KADOC, Archives of Father Joseph De Munck, file 4.8.17.1. Letter of Émile Debaisieux dated August 7, 1956.

24 See for example da Roma and Bontinck (1964:131), Guattini and Carli (2006:108, 239–240), da Lucca and Cuvelier (1953:325). In one of the graves of the ancient cemetery of Kindoki near the village of Mbanza Nsundi, the deceased was buried with a musket. A charcoal there was dated to 190 ± 30 BP, that is to say between cal AD 1665–1954 (Beta 333285) (Clist et al. 2013:66, Clist et al. 2015b:395–96, 399).

25 Five of them belong to the collections of the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren. Three other items are kept respectively in the Hamburgisches Museum für Völkerkunde (Thiel 1980:11), in the Hood Museum of Art (Fromont 2014:263) and in a private collection (Jiunshyan 2005:72). Two other crosses were published by Olson-Manke (1928:221) and the latter by Weeks (1914:188).

26 A photo taken in 1914 by Axel Hammar shows two *santu* crosses hung on the wall of a house in the village of Gombe-Lutete to the north of Mbanza-Ngungu (Olson-Manke 1928:221–23, Manker 1929:112–13). He noted that these crosses were carefully preserved and regularly sprinkled with chicken blood (Olson-Manke 1928:222).

27 Also note that the crucifix coming from Ngongo Mbata, decorated with this same pattern and mounted on a sharp rod, was also likely to be stuck in the ground, enhancing even more the idea of a cyclic passage from life to death, crystallized by the Kongo cross.

28 In his study on the ancient art of metal in Lower

Congo, Wannyn also denominated it *dienge a mfumu*, that is to say "ring of chief" (Wannyn 1961:82, pl. 29). Its inventory number is 55.95.40.

29 Both of these documents written by Manuel I were published by Brásio: one of the letters, dated August 14, 1514, is addressed to Rui Lete, collector of the treasury (Brásio 1952 1:287, doc. 80) and the other, dated August 30, 1516, was intended for Sebastião de Vargas, treasurer of the house of Guinea (Brásio 1952 1:366–68, doc. 102).

30 In the Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, I have identified two letters with the same cruciform pattern written by D. Manuel, brother of the king Afonso I. The first one is dated August 9, 1543 (n° PT/TT/CC/1/73/41). It is addressed to the Portuguese King João III. D. Manuel asks him to give him back 400 cruzados that a certain Diogo de Campos owed to his brother, Afonso I. The second letter is dated June 15, 1543 (PT-TT-CC/1/73/122). See also the unpublished documents PT/TT/CC/1/21/90 and PT-TT-CC/133/44 respectively dated April 22, 1517, and December 27, 1525, and kept at Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, which also show the same pattern. See also Fromont 2014:105–106.

31 See also the description made in 1699 by Marcellino d'Atri of the Matotello cave having delivered some human bones (Toso, 1984:206–208).

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